



Strategic Plan

Arizona Employment First Core Team Members

Chair

Linda Tasco, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Arizona Department of Economic Security

Members

Jennifer Baier, VALLEYLIFE

Amy Boyer, The Centers for Habilitation

Larry Clausen, Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

Leslie Cohen, Sonoran University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, University of Arizona

Gina Griffiths, Scottsdale Training & Rehabilitation Services (STARS)

Janet Holt, Cave Creek Unified Schools

Mark Jacoby, Gompers Habilitation Center

Dara Johnson, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System

Jeri Kendle, Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center

Steve King, Beacon Group

Lynda Kosnik, Rehabilitation Services Administration/Vocational Rehabilitation

Michael Leyva, Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

Nicholas Love, Arizona Bride to Independent Living

John Robert McDermott, Institute for Human Development, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Northern Arizona University

John Muir, Cave Creek Unified Schools

Laura Schweers, Sonoran University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, University of Arizona

Sara Sembiente, Rehabilitation Services Administration/Vocational Rehabilitation

Ralph Serpico, Untapped Arizona

Margaret Corcoran Smith, Attorney, Parent, Advocate

Jennifer Thorson, Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center

Chuck Tiller, Beacon Group

Tom Uno, Institute for Human Development, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Northern Arizona University

Leslie Williams, Raising Special Kids

Susan Voirol, Exceptional Student Services, Arizona Department of Education

Facilitator

B.J. Tatro, B.J.Tatro Consulting

Vision

Competitive employment is the preferred daily activity for all working age Arizona citizens with disabilities.



Guiding Principles

- ★ The current low participation rate of people with disabilities in the workforce is unacceptable. Access to “real jobs with real wages” is essential if people with disabilities are to avoid lives of poverty, dependence, and isolation.
- ★ All working age people with disabilities can participate in jobs that provide for meaningful work, with pay at or above minimum wage, benefits, and opportunities for integration with other workers.
- ★ As with all other individuals, employees with disabilities require assistance and support to ensure success on the job and should have access to supports needed to succeed in the workplace.
- ★ All people, regardless of disability, have the right to pursue the full range of available employment opportunities and to earn a living wage in a job of their choosing, based on their talents, skills, and interests.
- ★ Outreach efforts should include diverse populations statewide.
- ★ Policies and practices should be conducive to the employment of people with disabilities in general and Employment First principles in particular.
- ★ Benefits counseling should be available to all people with disabilities who want to work so that they understand the options available to them.

What is Employment First?

Employment First encompasses the belief that community-based, integrated employment should be the primary day activity for working age youth and adults with disabilities.

It supports an overarching goal that eligible persons with disabilities will have access to integrated work settings most appropriate for them, including the supports necessary to help them succeed in the workplace.

Employment First does not mean employment only and does not deny individual choice.

Employment First does not eliminate service options currently available but is intended to increase employment opportunities.

Why Employment First in Arizona?

In 2012, only 20% of people in the DDD system receiving day services were in integrated employment.

In 2012, only 14% of DDD funding spent on day and employment services went to integrated employment.

People who work have a higher quality of life, greater community participation, and are more likely to make their own choices in life.

New regulations from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, Department of Justice and the Department of Labor are requiring states to prioritize integrated services for everyone with a disability.

Who is Involved in Arizona Employment First?

- Advocates
- Educators
- Employers
- Employment Service Provider Agencies
- Family Members
- State Agencies:
 - Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System
 - Arizona Department of Education/
Exceptional Student Services
 - Arizona Developmental Disabilities
Planning Council
 - Division of Behavioral Health Services
 - Division of Developmental Disabilities
Rehabilitation Services Administration/
Vocational Rehabilitation
- University Centers for Excellence in
Developmental Disabilities
- Youth and Young Adults

Key Directions

- 1** Foster and maintain **COLLABORATION** in order to increase the competitive employment of people with disabilities

Strategy:

 - #1: State level collaboration
 - #2: Local level collaboration
- 2** Increase **AWARENESS** of the potential of people with disabilities and **ADVOCATE** for their competitive employment

Strategy:

 - #1: Education for people with disabilities
 - #2: Education for families
 - #3: Education for employers
 - #4: Education for those who provide support
 - #5: Public awareness
- 3** Prepare **YOUTH** for competitive employment, especially in high potential employment sectors and including self-employment

Strategy:

 - #1: Education/support for youth, starting early and continuing through adulthood
 - #2: Education/support for families
 - #3: Education/support for those who prepare youth for employment
- 4** Foster **JOB** creation, hiring, retention, promotion, and self-employment

Strategy:

 - #1: Technical assistance and other supports for employers
 - #2: Incentives for employers and those who contribute to job development, retention, and promotion
- 5** Create and promote **POLICIES** that lead to the successful employment of people with disabilities

Strategy:

 - #1: Identify and communicate Employment First policy benefits
 - #2: Identify and address policy barriers; build on policies that have worked
 - #3: Research, propose, and implement new policies that support the successful employment of people with disabilities
 - #4: Incorporate Employment First into state plans and protocols
 - #5: Establish a service delivery model that facilitates transition to competitive employment
- 6** Foster the development of employment-focused **SUPPORTS**

Strategy:

 - #1: Provide education and ongoing professional development

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

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KEY DIRECTION	STRATEGY	MAJOR ACTION
COLLABORATION	1.1 State level collaboration	Create a statewide alliance with shared goals and measures of success
		Continue the community of practice on transition
	1.2 Local level collaboration	Collaborate with those working on Employment First nationally and in other states
		Create local alliances with shared goals and measures of success
		Provide regular updates on what is going on nationally and in Arizona
		Explore creation of an infrastructure to support Arizona Employment First
AWARENESS & ADVOCATE	2.1 Education for people with disabilities	Develop and provide audience-specific advocacy education using a peer approach
		Identify champions in each stakeholder group
		Reach out to under-represented groups and areas
	2.2 Education for families	Develop and provide audience-specific advocacy education using a peer approach
		Identify champions in each stakeholder group
		Reach out to under-represented groups and areas
	2.3 Education for Employers	Identify champions in each stakeholder group
		Reach out to under-represented groups and areas
		Include a wide variety of professionals who support people with disabilities
	2.4 Education for those who provide support	Identify champions in each stakeholder group
		Reach out to under-represented groups and areas
		Include a wide variety of professionals who support people with disabilities
	2.5 Public awareness	Identify champions in each stakeholder group
		Include a wide variety of professionals who support people with disabilities
	YOUTH	3.1 Education/support for youth, starting early and continuing through adulthood
Promote use of planning tools and other promising practices for all ages		
Provide opportunities for work experience, promote career exploration		
3.2 Education/support for families		Promote use of benefits counseling
		Engage self-advocacy and family support organizations in education and support
3.3 Education/support for those who prepare youth for employment		Promote use of benefits counseling
		Promote use of planning tools and other promising practices for all ages
		Provide opportunities for work experience, promote career exploration
		Promote use of benefits counseling

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KEY DIRECTION	STRATEGY		MAJOR ACTION
	JOB	4.1	Technical assistance and other supports for employers
			Identify champions in high potential employment sectors
			Utilize a peer approach
			Provide diversity training for co-workers
4.2		Incentives for employers and those who contribute to job development, retention and promotion	Create incentives for employers and those who contribute to job development, retention, and promotion

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POLICIES	5.1	Identify and communicate Employment First policy benefits	Identify current Federal and State policies that can support hiring, retention, and promotion of people with disabilities
			Communicate with employers about how hiring, retention, and promotion of people with disabilities contribute to compliance with policy mandates
	5.2	Identify and address policy barriers; build on policies that have worked	Identify current Federal and State policies that can support hiring, retention, and promotion of people with disabilities
			Identify policies that represent a barrier, policy gaps, promising approaches to addressing these, and policy partners who can help
	5.3	Research, propose, and implement new policies that support the successful employment of people with disabilities	Communicate with employers about how hiring, retention, and promotion of people with disabilities contribute to compliance with policy mandates
			Identify policies that represent a barrier, policy gaps, promising approaches to addressing these, and policy partners who can help
	5.4	Incorporate Employment First into state plans and protocols	Establish the State of Arizona as a model employer, promote among other governmental jurisdictions
	5.5	Establish a service delivery model that facilitates transition to competitive employment	Communicate with employers about how hiring, retention, and promotion of people with disabilities contribute to compliance with policy mandates
		Establish the State of Arizona as a model employer, promote among other governmental jurisdictions	

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SUPPORTS	6.1	Provide education and ongoing professional development	Create a cadre of qualified employment support professionals, identify or develop curricula and implement certification and ongoing professional development for job coaches and job developers, link credentials to rates
			Using a peer approach, provide training and technical assistance to service providers re: transition of business practices, share promising practices
			Identify and share models for supporting transition from school to employment for/with youth, families, schools, State agencies, and employers

What Success Looks Like

There are measurable increases in employment of people with disabilities within the general workforce, earning minimum wage or higher with benefits.

Youth with disabilities have the independent living skills required to pursue employment and the work experiences that are typical for their age group.

Greater opportunities exist for people with disabilities to pursue self-employment and the development of microenterprises.

Employers universally value people with disabilities as an integral part of their workforce and include them within general recruitment and hiring efforts as standard practice.

Employment is the first and preferred option when youth with disabilities are exploring and setting their life goals.

People with disabilities have increased incomes, financial assets, and economic wealth.

People with disabilities are employed within the general workforce, regardless of the severity of disability and assistance required.

People with disabilities have greater opportunities to advance their careers by taking full advantage of their individual strengths and talents.

Funding is sufficient so that quality services and supports are available as needed for long-term employment success.

People with disabilities have a regular opportunity to revisit their employment choice.



Next Steps

Implementation of the Arizona Employment First Plan will require the active and ongoing involvement of a variety of stakeholder groups, including youth and adults with disabilities, advocates, educators, employers, employment service provider agencies, family members, State agencies, University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, policymakers, and potential funders. Many of the partners who helped to develop the plan have been providing and will continue to provide support for staff time and various administrative functions required to develop and implement the plan. It is anticipated that some level of additional funding will be needed to support the collaborative work and that there may be opportunities for partner organizations to jointly fund some functions. Resources needed to support implementation will be further explored by stakeholders who become involved in the statewide and/or local alliances that are expected to emerge.

Evaluation Measures

There will be progress reports posted online throughout the implementation process. Process measures corresponding to the various Key Directions, Strategies, and Major Actions in the plan will be identified and tracked, e.g., collaborative partners involved in implementation of the plan, educational events for various audiences, technical assistance provided to employers, policies changed/developed, professional development activities designed for employment support professionals.

Additionally, there are some overarching outcome measures that will be monitored, if and when reliable and valid data become available. These include:

- Percentage of working age adults with disabilities who are competitively employed;
- Percentage of competitively employed working age adults with disabilities retained for a specified period of time; and
- Percentage of competitively employed working age adults with disabilities who are promoted.

If possible, the data will be reported by age, gender, and disability.

Currently there are some sources that provide partial data, including the Arizona Department of Education's Statewide Post School Outcomes (PSO) Survey, which tracks the status of a sample of youths one year after they leave school. Additionally, outcomes are tracked by both the Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Rehabilitation Services Administration for persons whom they serve. These sources do not capture the total population of working age adults with disabilities but will serve as a starting point.

A work group will be convened to identify and/or plan for the development of data sources for these measures. The data plan will address where and how the data will be captured and who will collect, analyze, and report the data. The group may also be charged with identifying additional Employment First process and outcome measures.

Generally Accepted Definitions

Competitive Employment — Employment in the community, full-time or part-time, paid at minimum wage or higher, with wages and benefits equal to those without disabilities performing the same work.

Customized Employment — Competitive integrated employment for an individual with a disability, including someone with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual and meets the business needs of the employer, carried out through flexible strategies.

Group Supported Employment — A group service for individuals with disabilities providing continuous paid supports in a supervised community integrated employment. Participants are paid sub-minimum, minimum and/or prevailing wages in accordance with State and Federal labor laws by the employment service agency contracted to provide the on-site supervision.

Integrated Employment — Work in a community setting where individuals with disabilities interact with others without disabilities to the same extent as anyone working in that setting.

Job Coaching — A time-limited service that provides regular contacts with a competitively employed individual with disabilities and/or with their employer to help the employee develop the specific on-the-job skills necessary for successful employment including: positive work-related habits, attitudes, skills, and work etiquette directly related to their specific employment, as well as

assisting the member to become a part of the informal culture of the workplace.

Micro-Enterprises — Small businesses owned by individuals with disabilities who have control and responsibility for decision-making and overseeing the business, with accompanying business licenses, taxpayer ID, other than Social Security numbers, and separate business bank accounts. They may be considered integrated competitive employment.

Self-Employment — An employment setting in which an individual works in a chosen occupation, for profit or fee, in his or her own small business, with control and responsibility for decisions affecting the conduct of the business.

Sheltered/Center-Based Employment — This is a service provided in a non-community integrated, supervised work environment where participants with disabilities engage in work and work-related activities. Participants are to be involved in gainful work and supported in developing skills, abilities, and behaviors that will enable them to transition into more integrated employment settings. Participants are paid sub-minimum, minimum and/or prevailing wages for all compensatory work in accordance with State and Federal labor laws.

Supported Employment — Community integrated employment that includes the provision of ongoing supports, both formal (employment provider, technology, etc.) and natural (co-workers, friends, family) based on the person's needs to ensure on the job success.

*The only place success comes before work
is in the dictionary.*

- Vince Lombardi



How to Join Arizona Employment First

If you wish to assist with the implementation of the Arizona Employment First initiative, please provide your contact information - name, title, organization, email, and telephone number - to Michael Leyva at mleyva@azdes.gov.



